Shakespeare for Everyone

Romeo and Juliet

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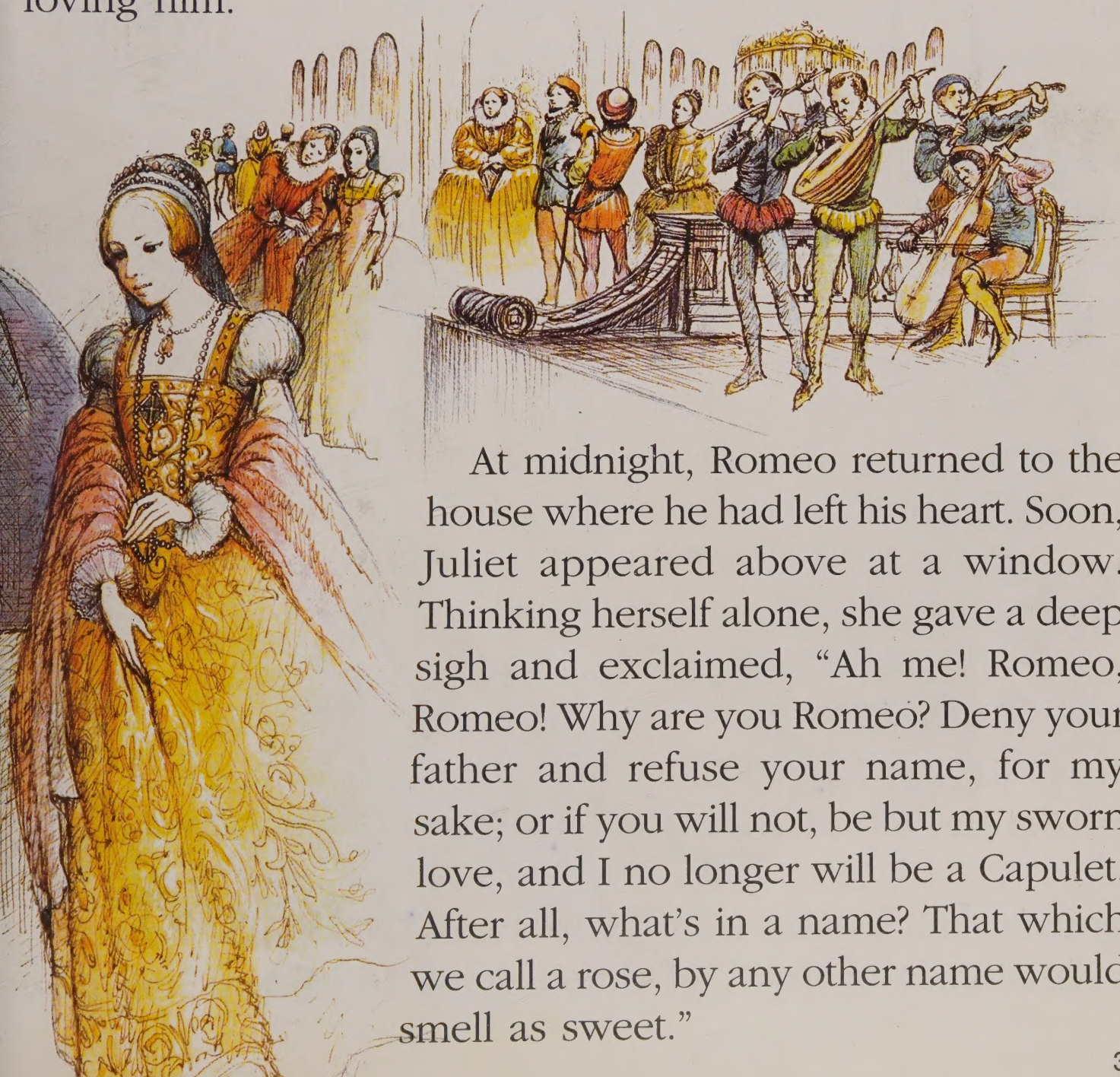
The rich Capulets and the Montagues were the two chief families in Verona. There was an old enmity between the two families that was so strong and deep rooted, that even if the servants of one of the houses met the servants of the other, a fierce and bloody battle would ensue. These brawls had disturbed the peace and quiet of Verona's streets.

One night, old Lord Capulet invited many fair ladies and noble guests to a great supper. All the admired beauties of Verona, including Rosaline, were present at the gathering. Rosaline was a beautiful lady who was adored by Romeo, the only son of Lord Montague. Benvolio, Romeo's friend, suggested to Romeo that he attend the great supper to see for himself that there were other beautiful women besides Rosaline, who had never returned Romeo's love. To this feast of the Capulets, then, young Romeo, with Benvolio and their friend Mercutio, went masked.

Old Lord Capulet welcomed them. As he looked around, Romeo was struck by the beauty of a lady who was dancing there. While Romeo was praising her, Tybalt, a nephew of Lord Capulet, recognised him as Romeo. Being of a passionate and fiery temper, he would have struck Romeo dead at once because he was a Montague. But his uncle, the old Lord Capulet, said that Romeo had conducted himself like a gentleman and all in Verona talked of him as a virtuous and well-governed youth. Tybalt had to contain himself, but swore that the vile Montague should at another time pay heavily.

Once the dancing got over, Romeo began talking to the lady. They fell instantly in love with each other. Romeo later discovered that the lady whose unmatched beauty he had been so smitten by was young Juliet, daughter and heir to Lord Capulet, the great enemy of the Montagues. This troubled him, but he could not stop loving her. Juliet was also horrified to learn that the man she had fallen head over heels in love with, was a Montague. But she could not stop herself from loving him.



At midnight, Romeo returned to the house where he had left his heart. Soon, Juliet appeared above at a window. Thinking herself alone, she gave a deep sigh and exclaimed, "Ah me! Romeo, Romeo! Why are you Romeo? Deny your father and refuse your name, for my sake; or if you will not, be but my sworn love, and I no longer will be a Capulet. After all, what's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet."

Romeo could not stop himself. He took up the dialogue as if Juliet's words had been addressed to him personally. He told her to call him Love, or any other name that pleased her, for he would no longer be Romeo, if that name was displeasing to her.

Juliet recognised his voice and was worried about the danger he had exposed himself to. Being a Montague, if he was spotted by any of her kinsmen, it would mean sure death for him.

"Alack!" said Romeo. "Better my life should be ended by their hate than that hated life should be prolonged to live without your love."

Juliet was at first overcome with embarrassment that Romeo had overheard her declarations of love. But then she said with an honest frankness that though her behaviour to him might not be prudent, as compared to the custom of her sex, yet she would prove more true than many others with artificial modesty.

Romeo wanted Juliet to exchange a vow of love with him that night. She replied that she had already given him hers before he requested it.

Just then Juliet's nurse called her in. She went in, but returned to say that if his love was honourable, and he intended to marry her, she would send a messenger to him the next day to appoint a time for their marriage. Both she and Romeo were loath to part from each other. But part they did eventually, wishing each other sweet rest for that night.

Romeo was full of thoughts of Juliet and of the meeting with her. Instead of going home, he went to a monastery

close by, to Friar Lawrence. Romeo told the friar about his new passion for Juliet and then requested him to help them get married that very day. The holy man wondered at the sudden change in Romeo's affections, for he had known all about Romeo's love for Rosaline and her disdain for him.

The friar thought that a marriage alliance between young Juliet and Romeo might be a means of making up the breach between the Capulets and the Montagues, and so he agreed to join their hands in marriage.

Juliet's messenger told her about Romeo's intent, and she reached the cell of Friar Lawrence, where he joined their hands in holy matrimony and prayed that in their union the old strife and long dissensions of their families would be buried.

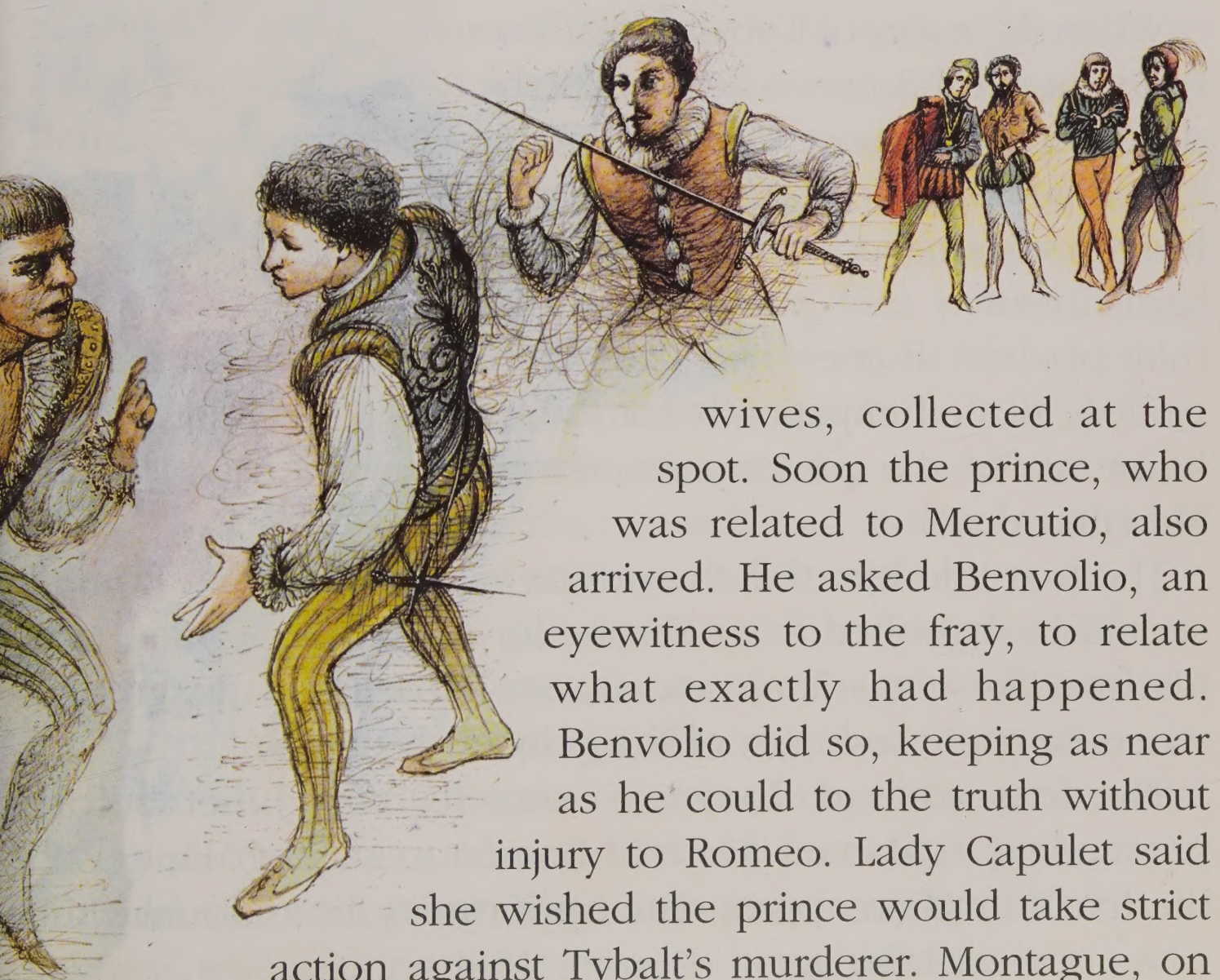
When the ceremony got over, Juliet rushed home, and waited impatiently for the coming of night. That was when Romeo had promised to meet her in the orchard at the same place where they had met the previous night.

That day, at noon, Romeo's friends Benvolio and Mercutio, while walking through the streets of Verona, met a group of Capulets which included Tybalt.

Tybalt accused Mercutio of associating with Romeo, a Montague. Despite Benvolio's attempts at making peace, a fight was brewing between Tybalt and Mercutio when Romeo happened to pass that way. Tybalt turned to Romeo and called him a villain. Romeo tried to avoid a quarrel with Tybalt because he was Juliet's kinsman.

But Tybalt did not listen to reason and drew his sword. Mercutio fought Tybalt on behalf of Romeo, till Tybalt stabbed him finally. This inflamed Romeo and he fought and killed Tybalt. Horrified at the turn of events, Benvolio urged Romeo to flee.

The news of this brawl spread like wildfire and a huge crowd, including Lord Capulet and Montague, with their



wives, collected at the spot. Soon the prince, who was related to Mercutio, also arrived. He asked Benvolio, an eyewitness to the fray, to relate what exactly had happened. Benvolio did so, keeping as near as he could to the truth without injury to Romeo. Lady Capulet said she wished the prince would take strict action against Tybalt's murderer. Montague, on the other hand, argued that since Tybalt's life was already forfeited to the law for having slain Mercutio, Romeo had

done nothing that deserved punishment, in taking Tybalt's life. The prince reproached the Montagues and the Capulets, saying that he had lost a dear kinsman because of their brawls. He vowed to make them pay for this loss. He decided to banish Romeo from Verona, as punishment. He refused to hear any pleadings or excuses. He said that Romeo should leave Verona immediately, for if he was seen anywhere in the city, that hour would be his last.

When the news of Tybalt's death reached Juliet, she was at first enraged at Romeo's action. But the tears of grief at Tybalt's death turned to those of joy and relief when she realised that Tybalt would have slain her husband if Romeo had not killed him first. Then came fresh tears of grief for Romeo's banishment.

Meanwhile, Romeo had taken refuge in Friar Lawrence's cell. He waited impatiently for the friar to come and let him know about the prince's reaction on seeing his kinsman Mercutio dead.

The friar told him that the prince had decreed that Romeo should be banished from Verona for his crime. Romeo tore his hair like a madman and threw himself on the ground when he came to know of the prince's sentence.

The friar advised Romeo to secretly visit Juliet before proceeding to Mantua. He told Romeo to stay at Mantua till the friar found an appropriate opportunity to announce the news of their marriage.

The friar was of the opinion that the prince would definitely pardon him and he would return with twenty times more joy than he went forth with grief. Romeo was convinced by what

the friar said and proceeded accordingly.

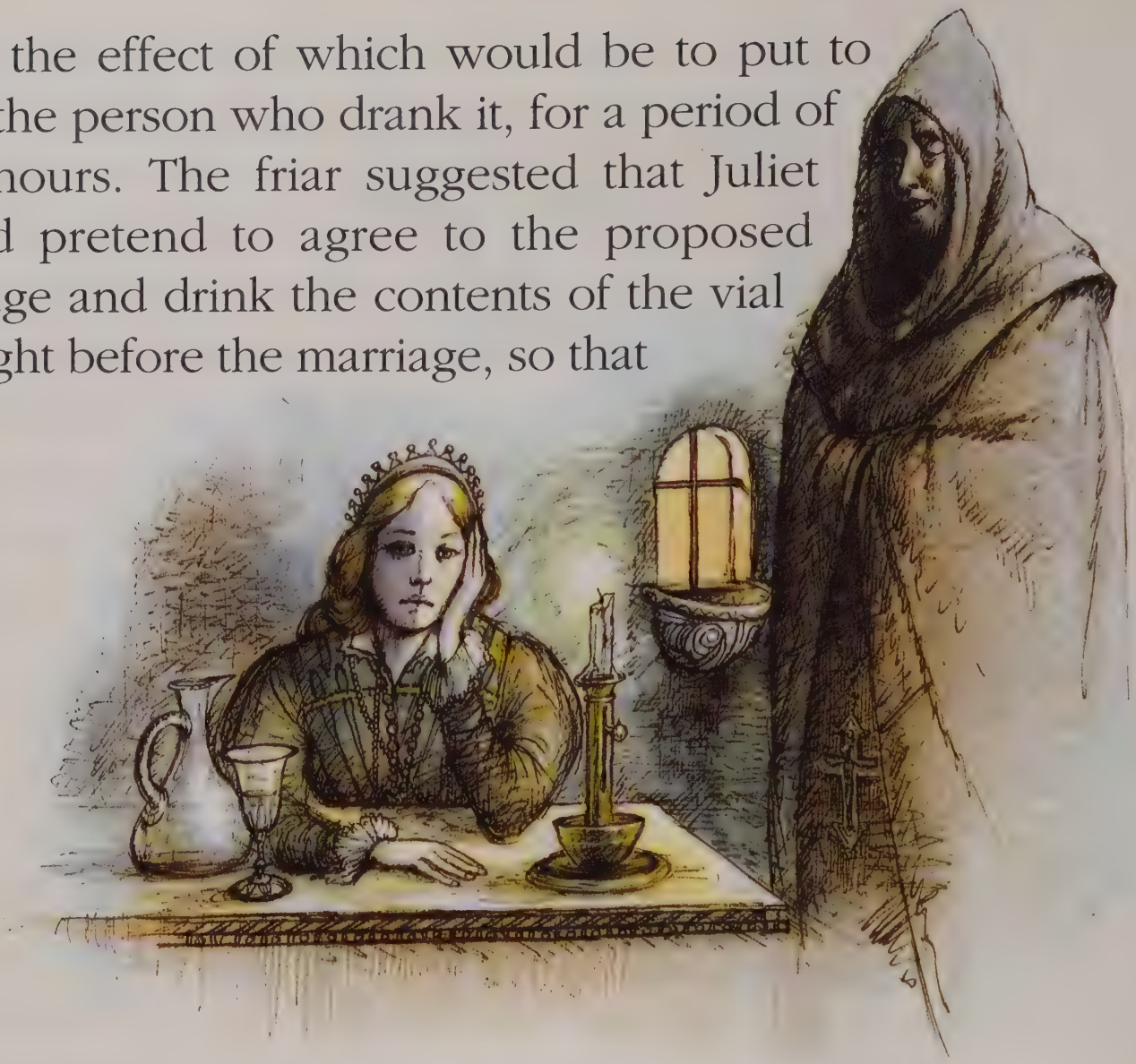
Romeo went to Juliet's house and they passed the night in her chamber. The unwelcome daybreak came too soon and Romeo took leave of his dear wife with a promise to write to her from Mantua every hour of the day.

This was just the beginning of the tragedy of these unfortunate lovers. Not many days had passed since Romeo's banishment, before old Lord Capulet chose Count Paris as the person Juliet was to marry. He would have been a perfect match had Juliet not already met and married Romeo.

Juliet was in a fix. She gave all sorts of excuses to plead against the match, all except the real one, that she was already married. But Lord Capulet turned a deaf ear to all that she said and ordered her to prepare to get married the following Thursday. He thought that natural shyness was making Juliet oppose her good fortune.

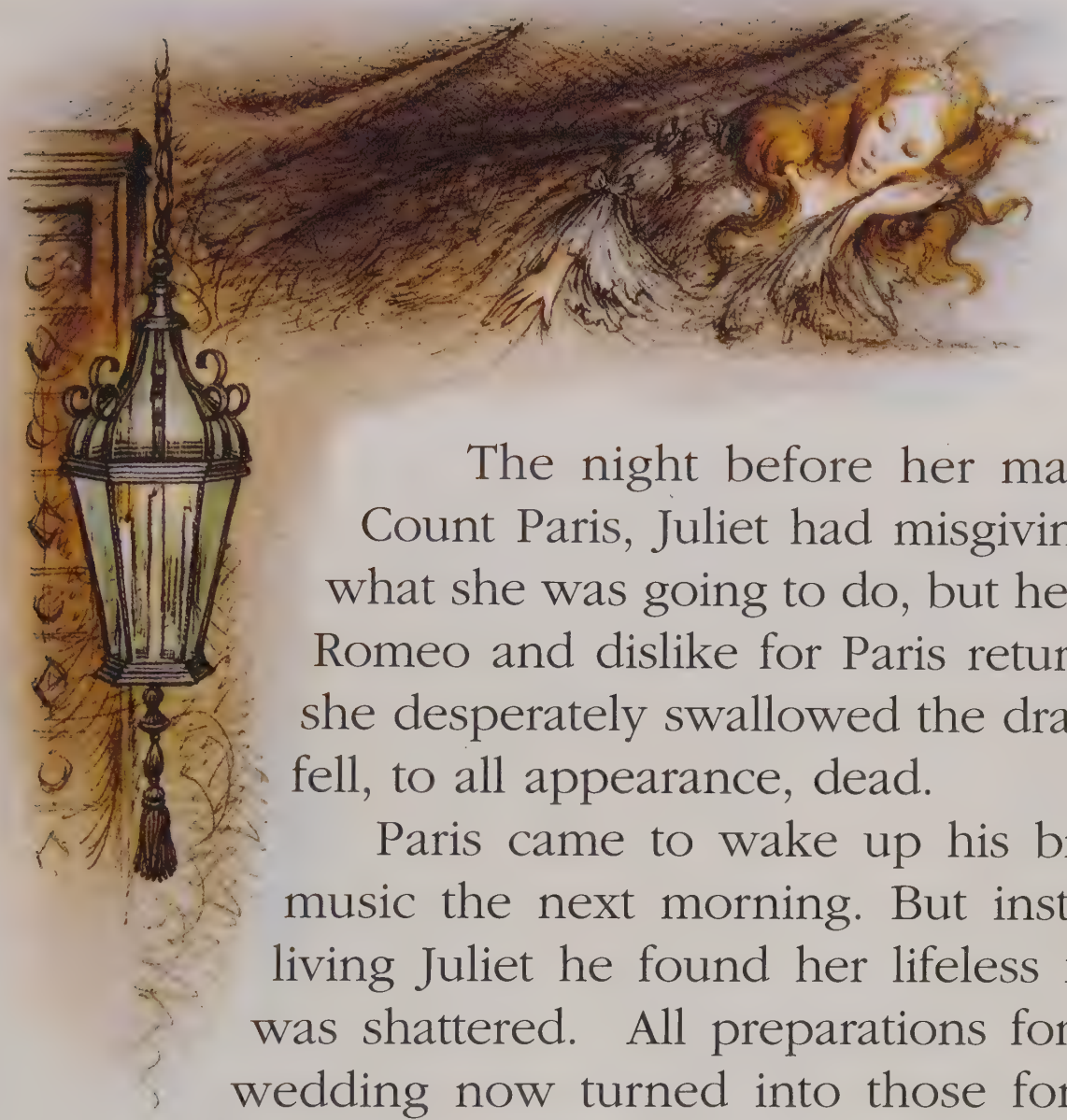
Juliet went to the friendly friar for help. She said that she would much rather die than marry Paris. Seeing how strongly Juliet felt about the situation, the friar gave her a vial of

drink, the effect of which would be to put to sleep the person who drank it, for a period of forty hours. The friar suggested that Juliet should pretend to agree to the proposed marriage and drink the contents of the vial the night before the marriage, so that



when she was to be taken to church for the wedding, she would appear dead. Then she would be given a burial in the family vault, from where Romeo would rescue her, as the friar would write and explain everything to Romeo beforehand. Love for Romeo and the dread of marrying Paris gave Juliet the strength to undertake this horrible task.

On the way back home from the monastery, Juliet met Count Paris and agreed to his marriage proposal. There was great rejoicing and her family began preparing for the wedding day.



The night before her marriage to Count Paris, Juliet had misgivings about what she was going to do, but her love for Romeo and dislike for Paris returned, and she desperately swallowed the draught and fell, to all appearance, dead.

Paris came to wake up his bride with music the next morning. But instead of a living Juliet he found her lifeless form. He was shattered. All preparations for a grand wedding now turned into those for a black funeral. Juliet was borne to church, amid much mourning and sadness.

Sad news travels faster than good. Before Romeo could receive Friar Lawrence's letter stating that Juliet lay in the tomb for only a short while, till Romeo would come and take her away from there, he received news that Juliet was dead.

Romeo set out for Verona to have a sight of his dear lady in her tomb. He bought poison from an apothecary on the way, with the intention of swallowing the poison and being buried by her side.

Romeo reached Verona at midnight and with a lamp, spade and a wrenching iron, went straight to the ancient tomb of the Capulets, where his Juliet was buried. Just as he was about to break open the monument, he was challenged by Count Paris, who had come to strew flowers on Juliet's grave. Romeo reminded him of Tybalt's fate but Paris paid no heed to his words, and paid with his life. When Romeo saw in the light of the lamp, that the man he had killed was Count Paris, who was to have married Juliet, he decided to bury him in Juliet's grave.

Romeo opened Juliet's grave and saw that she looked fresh and blooming, as if she had just fallen asleep, which she truly had. He laid Paris near Juliet and begged pardon of a lifeless Tybalt, who also lay there. Then, kissing his lady's lips for the last time, he swallowed the poison he had bought from the apothecary. Its effect was fatal.

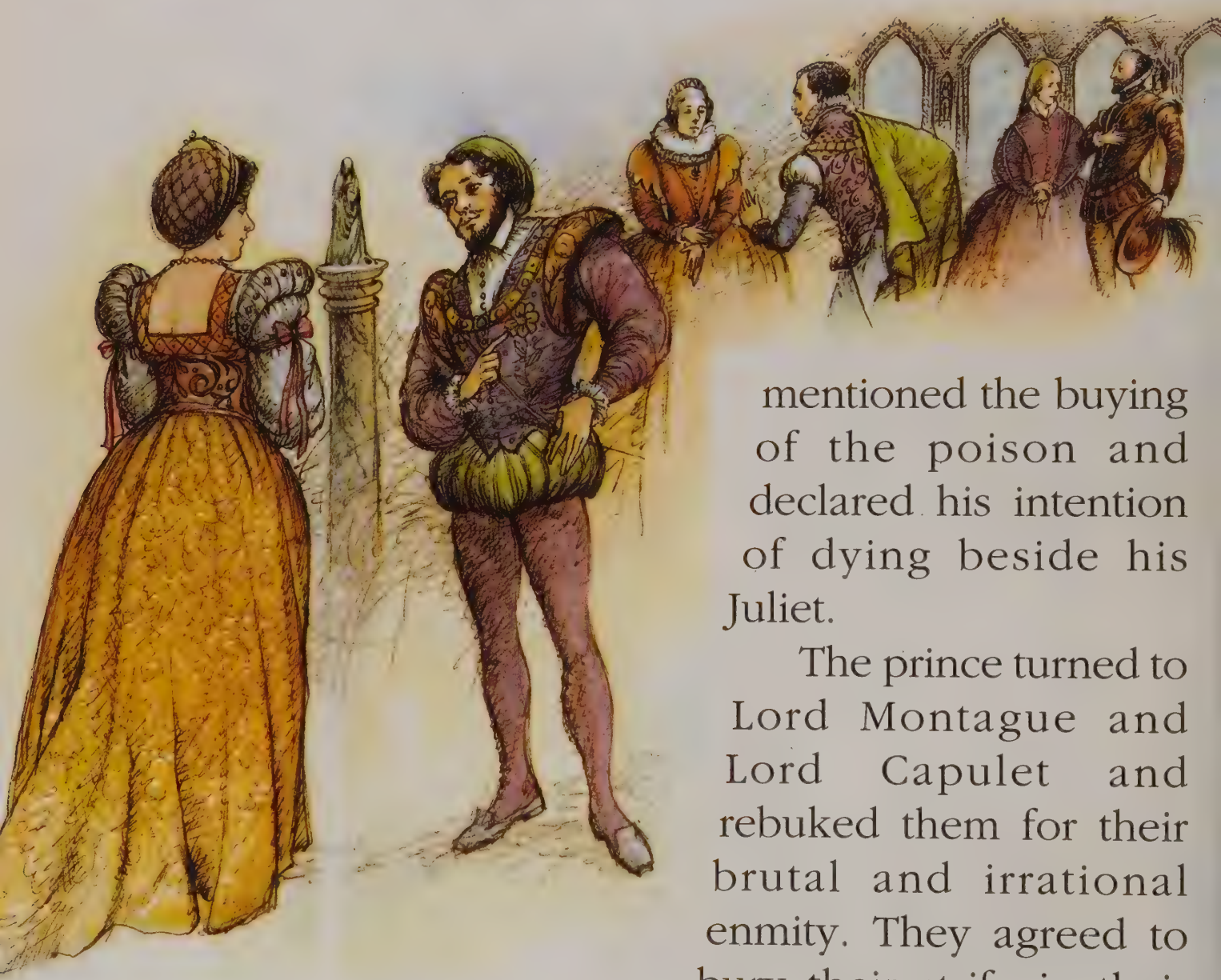
When the friar learned that Romeo had not received his letter, he hurried to Juliet's tomb with a pickaxe and a lantern, as it was nearly time for the effect of the potion to wear off. He was surprised to see a light already burning in the monument, and horrified to find the lifeless bodies of Paris and Romeo. Just then Juliet came out of her trance and, seeing the friar, asked for Romeo. Before the friar could say anything, he heard the noise of people approaching. He told Juliet that Romeo was dead, and beseeched her to come away. But Juliet saw the cup of poison closed in her true love's hands. She kissed his lips, in the hope that some of the poison would touch her lips

and kill her too. Then, hearing the noise of people coming closer, she snatched Romeo's dagger, which was lying by his side, and stabbed herself.

Meanwhile, some guards had spread the alarm and Lord Montague, Lord Capulet and the prince reached the burial

site. They demanded an explanation from Friar Lawrence, which he gave to the best of his ability. The rest of it was supplied by a page who had seen Paris and Romeo fight, and by the servant who had come with Romeo from Verona. He had a letter which he was to deliver to his master's father in the event of his death.

Romeo had, in his letter, confirmed his marriage to Juliet and implored the forgiveness of his parents. He also



mentioned the buying of the poison and declared his intention of dying beside his Juliet.

The prince turned to Lord Montague and Lord Capulet and rebuked them for their brutal and irrational enmity. They agreed to bury their strife in their children's grave forever.

The play's characters

Juliet

Juliet

Juliet is a young girl, only 14 years of age. She is a gentle person and obedient to her parents. And she is fond of the nurse who has looked after her since she was a baby. She belongs to a noble family from Verona. Her cousin is the quick-tempered young man, Tybalt. Probably because she is so young, Juliet does not have friends outside her family. This is a shame – because when her family force her to marry Paris, she has no young person to turn to for advice.

In a way, falling in love makes Juliet more grown-up. Now she does not rely on her parents but makes up her own mind. Her first thoughts are for Romeo. When Romeo is banished, she does not beg him to stay. This is because she knows he will be captured. Her love for Romeo becomes the most important thing in her life. In the end, she prefers to die rather than live her life without him.

Romeo

Romeo

Romeo is a person who rushes into things without thinking. When he hears that Juliet is dead, he sets off straightaway for Verona. And we know he bought poison to kill himself. But he is a kind-hearted, good man. He did not want to kill Tybalt. He is generous and kind to his friends. And when he kills Paris, he feels very sad.

Falling in love with Juliet helps Romeo grow up. At the beginning of the play, he feels sorry for himself. But at the end, he thinks of Juliet and not himself. When he kills himself, it is to be reunited with her.

Mercutio

Mercutio is one of the most likeable characters in the play. He is young and lively. And he is always talking and joking.

He is also loyal and honourable. When Romeo is insulted by Tybalt, he springs to his defence. Even as he dies from the wounds inflicted by Tybalt's sword, he is brave. His death is one of the saddest parts of the play.

Tybalt

Mercutio

Tybalt

Tybalt is a quarrelsome young man. He is a troublemaker who loves fighting. He is very angry when Romeo appears at the Capulets' ball. He wants to fight him straightaway. He is only prevented from doing this by Juliet's father. More than anyone else, he is the person who keeps the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets alive. He likes violence for its own sake. When he is killed by Romeo, we are not particularly sorry.

Lord and Lady Capulet

Lord Capulet is a stubborn old man. He can also be short-tempered. He loves his only daughter and wants the best for her.

Lady Capulet is much younger than her husband. She is an aristocratic lady, and not very warm-hearted. Although she probably loves Juliet, she is not as close to her as the nurse is. She thinks it is best for Juliet to marry a suitable person like Paris, even if she does not love him. She hates Romeo and demands punishment for him because he has killed Tybalt. She keeps the feud going more than her husband.

Lord and Lady Capulet

Friar Lawrence

Friar Lawrence is a wise and holy man. He is a priest and the person to whom both Romeo and Juliet turn for advice. And usually, he gives them good advice. Some people say, though, that he should not have married the lovers in secret. They say that it was wrong to deceive the parents of Romeo and Juliet.

The friar tells of his part in the tragic events. Like the Montagues and Capulets, Friar Lawrence suffers for his part in the tragedy.

The nurse

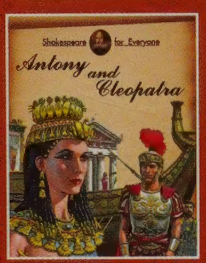
Juliet's nurse is a down-to-earth woman. She nursed Juliet as a baby and still fusses over her. She loves her like her own child. Juliet is very fond of the nurse. She confides in her – telling her about Romeo and the wedding.

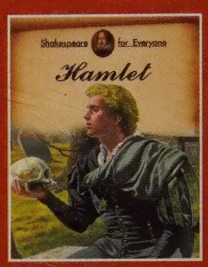
Paris

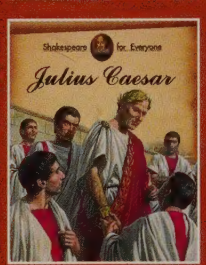
Paris is a handsome young man, pleasant and courteous. Because he is a cousin of the Prince of Verona, he is an eligible suitor for Juliet. He courts her in the correct way – by asking permission from her father. Paris seems to truly care for Juliet. He sorrowfully mourns at her grave. He is also brave when he approaches Romeo at the tomb and dies in the fight. Romeo is saddened at his death. He knows that Paris was an honourable man.

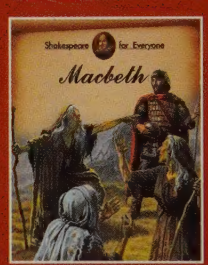
Shakespeare for Everyone

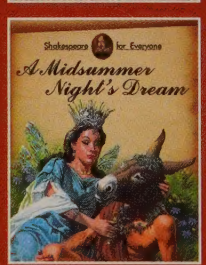
Romeo and Juliet is the story of two 'star-crossed' young lovers, whose families are engaged in a bitter feud. Though the love story ends in a tragedy, the play is remembered always as a celebration of true love.

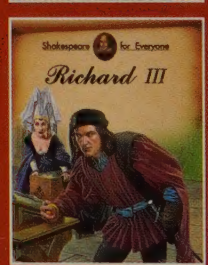












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